

Cameron: UK government "does not support Tibetan independence"

[9 May 2013] During the debate on the Queen's Speech in Parliament on 8 May, David Cameron clarified the UK's position on Tibet. The Prime Minister stated that the British government recognises Tibet as part of China and "does not support Tibetan independence". He said this had been a "long-standing British policy" which had not changed, and that the government was seeking a "strong and positive relationship" with China.

The policy clarification came during the MPs debate on the Queen's Speech on the opening day of the new parliamentary session. The Prime Minister emphasised that the UK must link itself to the fastest-growing economies in the world, including China. Sir Malcolm Rifkind MP then asked the Prime Minister about the current standing of the UK's relationship with China given "the very difficult problem of Tibet".

The Prime Minister responded saying, "Let us be absolutely clear: this Government have not changed the long-standing British policy towards China, and China and Tibet, and we do want to have a strong and positive relationship with China, which I believe is to our mutual benefit. The Chinese Government are aware of our policy on Tibet. We recognise Tibet as part of China. We do not support Tibetan independence, and we respect China's sovereignty, and when I spoke to Premier Li recently, we both looked forward to our countries working very closely together in the months and years ahead."

The statement comes after criticism from the Chinese government over last year's meeting between the Dalai Lama and the Prime Minister. China was reported to be seeking an apology, saying the meeting had "undermined" UK-China relations. On 7 May, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, who also met with the Dalai Lama last year, said the UK must continue to express its views on human rights and freedoms "in a respectful but nonetheless firm way."

Downing Street officials have said that it is hoped David Cameron will visit China later this year.

UPDATE (10 May 2013): Tibet Society has issued a campaign action, calling on the British government to support Tibetan rights and freedoms and urge China to end its oppression of Tibet. The action incorporates the government's latest statements plus their response to Tibet Lobby 2013.

UPDATE (17 May 2013): Read letter sent to Cameron by global Tibet coalition

Further reading: BBC (8 May) | AFP (8 May)

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